**Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible**

**Guidelines for Writers**

**Purpose of Project**

The purpose of the online Anabaptist Dictionary of the Bible (ADB) is to reflect (and to reflect critically on) an Anabap­tist approach to the reading of the Bible. The Dictionary is intended to serve those in the Anabaptist traditions as well as to be a respectful conversation partner with those in other Christian traditions as authors give voice to an appreciatively critical Anabaptist perspective. It is a Bible dictionary wiki project with an Anabaptist flavor.

**Origin and Early History of the Project**

In 2007 the Editorial Council of the [Believers Church Bible Commentary](http://www.heraldpress.com/bcbc/) series discussed the advisability of developing an online Anabaptist Bible dictionary. Each of the subsequent years saw further discussion of the possibility. In 2010 the Editorial Council asked [Dr. Paul M. Zehr](http://store.mpn.net/contributorinfo.cfm?ContribID=791) to develop a budget for the project and to seek funding for it. It also asked [Dr. Douglas B. Miller](http://www.tabor.edu/undergraduate/meet-faculty-students/douglas-miller) and [Dr. Loren L. Johns](http://www.ambs.edu/about/staff-and-faculty/loren-johns) (the current Old and New Test­a­ment editors of the BCBC) to serve as editors for the ADB and to launch the project by mid-2012. Early in 2011, Paul Zehr, [Amy Gingerich](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/news/releases/2009/06/Release06.htm) (of [MennoMedia](http://mennomedia.org/)), Doug Miller, and Loren Johns met to develop further the earlier planning. Initial grants funding the project have come from the United Service Foundation and the Schowalter Foundation.

**Project Design**

The online ADB will consist of articles and an invitation to comment. Although articles may not be changed without editorial approval, it is anticipated that changes will result from interaction from readers. Articles published will be allowed some air time before being revised, except in cases of egregious errors or embarrassments. Authors are to be historically and descriptively fair regarding Anabaptist perspectives while also theologically constructive in their writing. That is, the ADB should not only reflect (and reflect on) a historical tradition; it should also contribute theologically to Anabaptism as a living vision embodied in multiple church traditions today. Writers should write for the church and not just for the historian’s and biblical scholar’s guilds.

**Multilingual Global Project**

As a global project, the ADB is looking for French and Spanish editors who can develop comparable essays in those languages (and/or translate ones originally written in English). Funds for translating have not yet been obtained. Additional languages may be added as authors, editors, and funds become available.

**Nature of Articles**

As with other Bible dictionaries, most articles will be of two major types:

(1)    Descriptive overviews of biblical books that include the following:

* An introductory paragraph that sets forth the importance and relevance of the book, its significance for Anabaptists in particular, and some indication to what extent the book has been engaged by Anabaptists.
* An overview of critical issues: (a) date, setting and authorship, (b) form and rhetoric.
* A summary of the book’s content, perhaps incorporated with the following.
* Sequentially through the book, a discussion of texts that are particularly significant for Anabaptists. The length of this section will be negotiated between the writer and editors; a typical length may be 1500-2000 words.
* A concluding paragraph that summarizes important points and comments on the role of the book in the Christian canon.
* Select bibliography.

(2)    Thematic articles that include the following:

* An introductory paragraph that establishes the importance and relevance of the topic and its possible significance for Anabaptists. (Although we will likely begin the project with articles that have an obvious relevance for Anabaptist thought, we do not expect to limit the project to those.)
* A standard critical treatment of the topic that notes both intrabiblical historical developments and post-biblical developments. (Because this is to be a *Bible* dictionary, the emphasis should lie more on the *intrabiblical* developments.)
* Depending on the topic, the article might address (the changing?) distinctive approaches to the topic Anabaptists have taken over the years.
* Select bibliography.

Dictionary articles are intended to relate closely to the published [Believers Church Bible Commentary](http://www.heraldpress.com/bcbc/). The various commentary introductions and essays in the BCBC series may serve as a launch pad for the ADB. Authors should consult the BCBC when writing articles; the online ADB will be sprinkled with links to other resources on the web, as well as links to [the official BCBC web site](http://www.heraldpress.com/bcbc/) maintained by [MennoMedia](http://mennomedia.org/). Writings from the Apocrypha may be included as the project develops, since the Apocrypha figures prominently in early Anabaptist writings.

Anabaptist distinctives should be expressed (1) unapologetically and (2) in a way that reflects respective dialogue within the theological diversity of the Christian church. Authors should not shrink from articulating a theological vision within the theological space provided by ecumenical dialogue. The ADB should be primarily descriptive, but not exclusively so. Articles should not be narrowly parochial, e.g., U.S.-centric, in perspective.

**Article Length and Intended Audience**

Because the publishing medium for the ADB is the Internet, we do not face all of the economic constraints of print publishers. However, long articles can also be daunting, off-putting for the average reader. In most cases, we encourage writers to keep articles shorter than those that appear in the [*Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (AYBD)](http://yalepress.yale.edu/SeriesPage.asp?series=145). Writers should employ subheads liberally to help guide the presentation. More specific instructions regarding length may be assigned. The intended audience is broad: educated Christian believers of all traditions in settings across the world. The target reading ability is first-year college or its equivalent. Technical terms should be explained or avoided.

**Approach to the Bible**

The following characteristic emphases of 16th-century Anabaptist approaches to the Bible is representative of the work of such scholars as John Howard Yoder and [Stuart Murray Williams](http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/247):

(1) **The Two-Fold Word**: The Holy Spirit provides an inner word that brings the outer word to life in one’s lived response.

(2) **The Rule of Paul**: Claims to special revelation must be tested by the larger body of believers; the Bible is best read and interpreted in the congregation.

(3) **The Rule of Christ**: The promise of the Spirit’s blessing is for the purpose of practical discernment for discipleship, not for the apprehension of timeless truth.

(4) **Christocentrism**: All revelation—biblical or otherwise—must be understood in light of Christ and in light of following Christ.

(5) **The Priority of the New Testament**: Since the new covenant is superior to the now-obsolete old covenant, the New Testament is more authoritative than the Old Testament. The editors of ADB reject this simplistic approach and believe that continuities as well as discontinuities among the texts of Scripture must be explored and respected even as we affirm the fullness of God’s revelation in Christ.

(6) **The Epistemology of Obedience**: Obedience is not only the goal of reading the Bible; it is also its prerequisite.

(7) **The Bible as Self-Interpreting**: “The Word is plain and needs no interpretation” (Menno Simons), sometimes referred to as the perspicuity of Scripture. This item also has serious flaws because it fails to appreciate the lenses by which readers and the reading community engage the text. In writing for the ADB, authors of articles are asked to eschew modernistic objectivism.

(8) **Biblicism**: The 16th century Anabaptists shared with both Catholics and Protestants an approach to the Bible sometimes called “biblicism”: strict adherence to the letter of the Bible. In their own day, this doctrine was not controversial; it was simply accepted. The editors of ADB hold that this item is rightly abandoned by most contemporary Christians out of appreciation for the diversity of perspectives within the Bible and for the social and historical locatedness of the biblical texts.

(9) **Scripture Alone**: In contrast to the mother Church, but in keeping with other Protestants, the Anabaptists also held to the principle of *sola scriptura*: the Bible alone is authoritative for discerning God’s will; tradition and ecclesiastic authorities are subject to the authority of the Bible. The editors of ADB believe this item does not adequately appreciate the inevitable and even positive role that tradition plays in the church and in communities of interpretation.

While the heirs of the Anabaptist tradition have not subscribed to all of these elements, they may still serve as a guide for orienting the ADB project, with the above noted caveats.

**Standards**

We use *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition, as our standard for spelling. We use the University of Chicago’s *Manual of Style*, 16th edition, as our authority for style issues. Greek and Hebrew should generally be avoided. When necessary, they should be transliterated.

**Resources for Authors**

In addition to published volumes of the BCBC, the ADB editors encourage authors to be familiar with the following resources concerning Anabaptist approaches to Scripture:

 [“Biblical Interpretation in the Life of the Church: A Summary Statement,”](http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/B5383.html) adopted by Mennonite General Assembly, June 18-24, 1977, Estes Park, Colorado.

 Climenhaga, Arthur M., “Towards a Brethren in Christ Hermeneutic(s),” [*Brethren in Christ History and Life*](http://www.bicweb.org/ministries/histsoc/pub_act.htm) 1/1 (June 1978): 18-25.

 Clines, D. J. A., “[Biblical Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/cbr/hermeneutics_clines.pdf),” *Christian Brethren Review* 31/32 (1982): 65-76.

 [The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)](http://www.gameo.org/).

 Harder, Lydia Marlene. [*Obedience, Suspicion and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority*](http://books.google.com/books?id=2spsZDTfDu4C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false). Studies in Women and Religion, vol. 5. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1998.

 Kraus, C. Norman. [*Using Scripture in a Global Age: Framing Biblical Issues*](http://www.cascadiapublishinghouse.com/usg/usg.htm). Institute of Mennonite Studies Occasional Papers. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House, 2006.

 Murray, Stuart. [*Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*](http://mennolink.com/search.cgi?bk.sm.03.txt). Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2000.

 Snyder, C. Arnold, Gilbert Fast, Galen Peters. [*Biblical Concordance of the Swiss Brethren, 1540*](http://www.mennolink.org/books/search.cgi?bk.gfgp.01.txt). Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2001.

 Swartley, Willard M., ed. [*Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives*](http://www.ambs.edu/programs-institutes/IMS/text-reader). Text-Reader Series, no. 1. Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984. Out of print.

**Invitations to Write**

Authors are encouraged to contact one of the editors about the possibility of writing and the availability of specific writing assignments. The editors request a description of the writer including, but not limited to, educational and professional qualifications and experience. In addition, the editors welcome expressions of the writer’s interest in canonical literature and thematic studies. The editors will begin assigning articles for the ADB as soon as possible with January 1, 2012, as the initial due date for submitted articles.

**Compensation**

The ADB project does not have sufficient funds to reimburse authors. The author’s full name (not just initials) will appear with the article(s) he or she writes. Attribution may be adjusted if and when later forms of the article differ substantially from a person’s original contribution.

**The Editors**

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